

# AetherCon

## V

FEATURING...

ED GREENWOOD

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FUNNIEST GAMING  
STORY EVER

CONVENTION MAGAZINE 2016



# AetherCon

# V

NOVEMBER  
11-13, 2016

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*Cover Art By David Michael Wright III*

*Convention Magazine Layout By Colin Chan*

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# Q&A WITH SCHWALB ENTERTAINMENT

JAMES INTROCASO  
INTERVIEWS  
ROB SCHWALB

James Introcaso interviews Rob Schwalb of Schwalb Entertainment

**James Introcaso:** You always pay freelancers who work for you at the top of the industry's pay scale. Why is it important designers are compensated in this way and what lesson do you hope consumers and other companies take from this example?

**Rob Schwab:** I clawed my way into the RPG design business the hard way; selling words for as little as two cents a word. There are still two large published projects I wrote, but never saw a dime in compensation. RPG design and writing rates haven't changed in the 15 years I've been working in the field, and most companies still pay four cents or less per word. We make products for a very niche market. If we want great product, cool ideas, and more from the brightest minds in the business, publishers have to pony up for the talent. I hope, in some small way, to nudge the publishers toward improving their rates, even if this means raising the prices of products by a modest amount to compensate. Of course, being the publisher and lead designer for my small company means I shoulder most of the writing, largely to keep costs under control. Not every company can do this and I understand that, so it's a knot I'm not sure will ever get untied.

**JJ:** *Shadow of the Demon Lord* is a wonderfully elegant game that's easy to learn and play, but also provides players endless options when building characters. How did you crack the code of simple gameplay and limitless options?

**RS:** Hey, thanks! During design, I strove to please two groups of people so I could bring them to the same table and have a great experience. The first group included casual players: people with an interest in the hobby, but are neither willing, nor interested in spending an hour making ten decisions to create a character. I also focused on invested players; people who live and breathe tabletop RPGs, who delight in making characters and tinkering with the game. They have an idea about what kind of character they want to play and expect the game to deliver the options they need to realize that character.

The casual audience's needs kept my crunchy impulse in check, and let me focus on delivering those things that would keep both kinds of players at the same table. The result was a trim, flexible game engine that could adapt to a variety of circumstances, and is easy to learn and master. The mechanical options, which, as you point out, are many, live inside of bigger decision points. Invested players still have lots to choose from, but they choose big packages rather than spend their time making decisions about the small things that, in my experience, don't really matter much at all.

You choose three paths over the life of the campaign, which lets the character adapt and grow as the story progresses, while bundling interesting things together to completely bypass decision paralysis when a player is faced with combining mechanical elements from eight or more different sources. At the start of the campaign, characters are quite simple and easy to make. Each adventure completed grows the character's complexity from the widgets gained from previous or new big decision points. The player has the time to master those widgets and see how they work in play during the adventure, so that by the time the adventure ends, the player is ready to learn something new.



# Q&A WITH SCHWALB ENTERTAINMENT

JAMES INTROCASO  
INTERVIEWS  
ROB SCHWALB

**Jl:** The game already has 100 products available for purchase. How did you manage to get so many quality products shipped in so little time and why is it important for you to be so prolific?

**RS:** I've always been prolific when it comes to game design, even if it costs me free time, sanity, happiness, and my liver. The reason for pushing hard on SotDL is that my wee company is fighting for a place in a crowded field. Offering options and expansions to the core game that covers a variety of subjects reinforces to customers that the game is alive, well supported, and offering new and exciting expansions to the core. Delivering these expansions in bite-sized pieces lets people keep up with the game each week for less than it costs to buy a cup of coffee.

**Jl:** What do you think separates *Shadow of the Demon Lord* from other RPGs?

**RS:** I was very pragmatic about the design. We're busy people, maybe busier now than ever before. We have responsibilities. We have competing interests. We live complex and difficult lives. Who the hell has three years to invest in a campaign? Who can make all the game sessions making up the adventure? Heck, I sure can't. SotDL drags the best part of the campaign—the world-ending, world-shaking event—to the fore. A campaign asks players to commit to some number of adventures no greater than eleven. And, each adventure is a self-contained contained story, ideally playable in a single sitting, so if you can't make the next session, it's no big deal.

**Jl:** Can you give us a hint about what's to come after *Shadow of the Demon Lord*?

**RS:** We have some fun things coming next year, all driven by Kickstarter campaigns, though the next batch of products will be further expansions on *Shadow of the Demon Lord*, though with a far saner release schedule. We're going to be bringing *Freeport* to the world the *Demon Lord*, plus produce a delicious bestiary, a book on magic, and rules for playing legendary characters, though who move beyond the group to become movers and shakers in the world. While working on these, I will be starting design on a new game powered by the *Demon Lord* that I hope to reveal in 2018.

## SHADOW OF THE DEMON LORD

### The End Is Just the Beginning

Sometimes the world needs heroes. But in the desperation of these last days, the world will take all those it can get: heroes, blackguards, madmen, and whoever else is willing to stand against the coming darkness. Will you fight the demons or will you burn it all down and dance among the ashes? Who will you become when the world dies?

*Shadow of the Demon Lord*® opens a door to an imaginary world held in the grip of a cosmic destroyer. Enter a land steeped in the chaos and madness unleashed by the end times, with whole realms overrun by howling herds of beastmen, warped spirits freed from the Underworld, and unspeakable horrors stirred awake by the *Demon Lord*'s imminent arrival.

A complete tabletop roleplaying game in one book, *Shadow of the Demon Lord* provides everything you need to create and play characters, form groups in pursuit of adventure, and tell exciting stories with your friends. As well, the book gives Game Masters all the tools they need to create adventures, over one hundred foul creatures, a detailed region of the campaign world, and extensive advice to help run the game.

As the *Demon Lord*'s shadow creeps across the world, it creates the chance for heroes to seize their destinies and villains to accomplish their despicable goals. As you play the game, you and your friends tell stories about thwarting the plots of twisted cultists, hunting down and destroying bizarre demons, exploring lost lands, investigating weird mysteries, and so much more.

# WORLD BUILDER BLOG

Just a man and his homebrew world.

James Introcaso is a ENnie-winning blogger, podcaster, and game designer. He's almost caught them all. Almost.

[worldbuilderblog.me](http://worldbuilderblog.me)



# Q&A WITH ENCOUNTER TABLE PUBLISHING

CHRISTOPHER HUNT  
INTERVIEWS  
ROBERT BROOKES

The Gamer Nation Blog's Christopher Hunt caught up with Robert Brookes of Encounter Table Publishing to talk about Aethera ([aetherarpg.com](http://aetherarpg.com) @aetherarpg)

**Christopher Hunt:** For those who don't know, what is Aethera?

**Robert Brookes:** Aethera is a science-fantasy campaign setting for the Pathfinder RPG. It was successfully Kick-started back in November of 2015 and raised a phenomenal \$50,000! Aethera shakes up the basic assumption about a fantasy setting by stripping away a lot of the common tropes. You won't find elves, dwarves, or orcs in the Aethera Campaign Setting. Instead, we've created our own races to stand alongside humanity that have unique histories deeply entwined with the setting's mythology.

**CH:** Are there any insights or experiences from the development process you want to share?

**RB:** Working on Aethera was one of the best experiences I've had in collaborative game design. The team was split pretty evenly between seasoned industry professionals and first-time authors, all coming from very diverse backgrounds, bringing a plethora of unique perspectives to the table. We collaborated using Basecamp, a great web-based platform for large scale collaborative projects. What was great was seeing [our freelancers] refine, redesign, and rebuild our base ideas into something far, far greater than the sum of its parts.

One great example was the backstory of one of our new races, the Okanta. In the original design bible there was a pretty clear Native American vibe to them that was both really culturally appropriative and also just a tired trope of the "conquered native." One of our authors, Jessica Powell, brought that problematic design to the forefront and presented suggestions on how to create a more interesting and unique history for the Okanta. The team workshoped the idea and ultimately came up with a history that wound up informing the race's abilities and play-style. You can see how the Okanta turned out in our Aethera Campaign Setting: Early Access Guide available on [Paizo.com](http://Paizo.com) and DriveThru RPG.

**CH:** What does Paizo's upcoming Starfinder mean for Aethera?

**RB:** A few months ago, my response to that would've been a panicked shrug! I've been a contributor on Paizo's products for a few years now and they've been wonderful every step of the way in both the period of Aethera's inception, including when they informed me that Starfinder was going to be a reality. When Paizo's Editor-in-Chief Wes Schneider approached me about it, there was very much a concern on Paizo's part that they didn't want to damage Aethera and wanted to help in whatever ways they could to make sure we shared the market; the whole "rising tide lifts all boats" metaphor. There was some initial shock and confusion among folks that Paizo was trying to steal our thunder or pull a rug out from under us, and it couldn't be further from the truth. They've been wonderful.

There was a period of time where I had development on Aethera stop. This was after all freelancers had turned in their manuscripts and we were halfway through editing. We had just enough time that there was a possibility of re-aligning the rules to be a Starfinder game, rather than a Pathfinder game. I spent a few months re-examining our setting and system, talking with some backers, and Starfinder's creative director James Sutter. I came away with the firm belief that Aethera had to stand on its own two feet as a Pathfinder supplement, rather than hitch our wagon to Starfinder.

At the end of the day, Aethera is something that serves the Pathfinder RPG crowd. Starfinder is going to be its own game, its own system, and do its own thing and we wish it all the success in the world. Sutter is doing a bang-up job leading that team and I'm sure come August we're going to see a really awesome sci-fi game coming full speed to the market. But Aethera, at its heart, isn't really a full sci-fi game. Not as much as Starfinder is going to be. Magic really and truly takes the forefront in Aethera, and I think—without saying too much—Starfinder is going to head in a different direction, and that works out for all of us.



# ENCOUNTER TABLE PUBLISHING

# Q&A WITH ENCOUNTER TABLE PUBLISHING

CHRISTOPHER HUNT  
INTERVIEWS  
ROBERT BROOKES

**CH:** Can you describe for us what a game of Aethera "feels like"?

**RB:** One of my goals for Aethera was for it to feel like Pathfinder. I didn't want to strip away so much of what makes Pathfinder fun that it felt like a totally different game. When you play Aethera, you're playing Pathfinder, but the tools and setting we've created allow you to play Pathfinder in ways you haven't been able to before. The biggest driving force behind that is how our vehicle combat system works.

**CH:** What can you tell us about space combat?

**RB:** Long-time RPG designer Thurston Hillman created our entire vehicle combat system, of which space combat is just a part of. The system is incredibly deep—it has an enormous amount of customization options—but manages this without being overly complicated. I wanted a fast and fun vehicle combat system that didn't take a polymath degree to run!

The biggest "trick" of the system is that if you know how to run mounted combat in Pathfinder, you can basically run space combat. We designed the vehicles of Aethera to basically be gigantic animated objects (or plants, in the case of some species' vehicles). Instead of riding on top of them, you're inside of them. The vehicle you're piloting is moved by a magical engine that animates it and interfaces with the pilot. The ship inherits its Strength score from the engine and its Dexterity score from its pilot. That creates the basic stat block for any ship, which is then augmented by equipment in the way a character would be.

The other principle behind the vehicle combat rules is that I didn't want them to only involve the pilot. In most

sci-fi stories ship combat involves the entire bridge crew—just look at any Star Trek episode! We took that concept and expanded it to encompass the entire party. So, much like an ordinary Pathfinder game, the whole party contributes to vehicle combat. A pilot will control the ship's movement and forward-mounted weapons, martially-inclined folks might hop in a turret or prepare for boarding, spellcasters can cast buffs directly onto the ship and pilot (or with some loadouts cast spells through specially-designed turrets), other party members can enhance or adjust their vehicle's output utilizing engineering modules, and a host of other options.

There's a fun story from a convention playtest of one of our modules as well. In it there's a surprise attack on a rusting hunk of junk ship that the PCs are traveling in. This junky ship is attacked by an agile fighter in the atmosphere of a gas giant. The encounter is [able] to be resolved in a lot of ways. When I ran the playtest first at PaizoCon, the party repaired a seized turret on their ship and gained a dramatic firepower advantage over their enemy and were able to work together to overcome the odds. But at a GenCon playtest, the party didn't pick a pregen character with any repair abilities, but they did have buff Okanta warrior Arakhu. So, they flew up alongside the fighter when it was strafing by, opened the cargo bay doors, and Arakhu's player had him jump out of the hangar onto the fighter and basically smash it to pieces with his gigantic warhammer. When the playtest team told me about it, I was just awestruck. It sounded so epic!

That's the kind of action I wanted to bring to Aethera, where you can seamlessly switch between ship combat and regular combat. And, thanks to our amazing freelancers, that's exactly what we got!

Hungry for more? Watch for the extended interview at [d20radio.com](http://d20radio.com)!



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# VENDORS HALL

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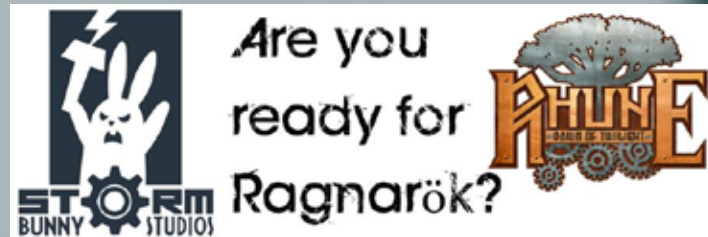


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# VENDORS HALL





# Q&A WITH CATALYST GAME LABS

ANTHONY BOYD  
INTERVIEWS  
JASON HARDY

I caught up with Catalyst Game Labs' Jason Hardy far from meat-space, recently. Considering his many roles as writer, editor, and Shadowrun line developer, our interview ranged through a few topic areas. There was more that I would like to share, but the highlights are here:

**Anthony Boyd:** Now well into SR5's run, with the classic core rule book areas complete (Grimoire, Chrome, Gear, Matrix, Riggers, Critters), and the release of an alternate setting (Court of Shadows) this year, what are your top priorities for the coming year for both the core line and Anarchy?

**Jason Hardy:** It's all still about giving toys to players. With the core books, the focus is on how to give more options and resources to players, and that focus remains the same; we are just looking at different ways to do it. Anarchy is a good example, since it offers a new way to play Shadowrun. We have the Sixth World Tarot coming out soon, and we will be working on a book to examine different ways to use that deck in your game, integrating it in ways that help the fantastic visuals add to the fun of a game. We also have a book called Cutting Aces, which will help players learn how to do con jobs, and provide tools to work that angle of the shadows. And one project I'm especially eager to get working on is The Complete Trog, a book full of guides and tools to playing troll and ork characters. It's an idea I've been wrestling with for a while, trying to figure out the best ways to make it useful, and I think we have developed some interesting angles to make this a book that will be fun to read but also useful in people's games.

**AB:** You have expressed an interest in the past in releasing compact, digital-only releases for SR5, such as the Touring the Stars books for BattleTech, how has the interest taken/been taking shape?

**JH:** The e-book line has been a great place for us to try weird things and experiment, and some books like The Way of the Adept and Gun H(e)aven have been really successful. It's been a slow year for e-books due to other commitments, but they're about to start up again, and one thing I'm anxious to see is a series of books exploring Morocco in the Sixth World, because we've never fleshed that part of the world out before. I love seeing how these experiments come together, and I'm anxious to put it in the hands of our players.

**AB:** In many collaborative endeavors, compromise is necessary in order to complete a project. Looking back at your time with Catalyst, what have been some of the more challenging but ultimately worthwhile collaborations?

**JH:** The first one I think of was the action point initiative system we were working on for SR5. It had some really good advantages—it flattened the curve a little between really fast and slower players, and it also didn't make slower characters sit and do nothing while other players took three or four actions. On top of that, it allowed for the introduction of interrupt actions, things players could do to change their course as combat went along, opting for defense possibilities if things seemed difficult. I liked a lot of things about it.

But then we playtested it, and it was slow. So sloooow. And the very last thing Shadowrun combat needs is something that slowed it down. I liked it, but I knew it had to go. The freelancers and I brainstormed, and we developed something that worked smoother and faster while keeping some of the advantages of the action point system. To get to that better thing, I had to let go of the action point idea that I liked.





# Q&A with Catalyst Game Labs

ANTHONY BOYD  
INTERVIEWS  
JASON HARDY

That sort of thing happens with almost every book. Anarchy is full of ideas from me and the listed writers and designers. Sometimes my arguments won out, sometimes others' arguments did, sometimes we found middle ground. There are too many good ideas out there for one person to get their way all the time.

**AB:** In your own gaming, what have you been playing lately? How much time do you have for the hobby as a participant, and what is your group like?

**JH:** I'm lucky in that the core of my group is my family—me, my wife, and teenage son. We have a few different sets of friends we play with at different times. Much of the summer was given to Anarchy playtesting, but we also have been playing various flavors of D&D with different friends. I also love board games, and we have a large collection I play with family and a whole rotating group of friends, SR freelancers, demo agents, and anyone else we can find who wants to play.

**AB:** Online Conventions, such as AetherCon and BrigadeCon, are growing in number, sophistication, and size. How do you see Catalyst's involvement in these events changing in the future?

**JH:** Tough to say—organizing cons is not my specialty, and I know even less about online cons. My main goal in any activity like this is to find some ways I can make things interesting for gamers. So, if being on panels is useful, I'll be in panels. If running games is desired, I'll run games. I'm flexible!

**AB:** If you were to launch a new SR campaign with a group of newcomers to both it and the hobby, how would you approach it?

**JH:** I'd do it with Shadowrun: Anarchy. I think the ease of learning it, combined with the chance of every player to contribute to the story, plus the flexibility in keeping the story moving instead of worrying about applying the rules with exact precision, is great for newcomers. Plus, when I've played it before, players did things like sliding under a charging gigantic bear, then attacking it from behind, and filling elevators with helium so everyone had to talk in a high-pitched voice for a round. It gets weird, is what I'm saying, but in a fun way.

**AB:** What do you think is the most overlooked element of the game line from your perspective?

**JH:** That's tough to say, as our fans do a great job of picking out just about every detail we put into things. But there are some clues and hints of things going on and moving forward that sometimes don't fully sink in. For example, I think there was some attention given to the mentions we gave to the Sixth World Tarot before we came out with a tarot deck, but I think a lot of the references flew under the radar—which is kind of how we wanted it. Also, to be both really vague and self-promoting at the same time, I think there were some events at the end of my most recent novel, Undershadows, that will interest long-time fans, but we need to get the book in more hands so they can see what happened and how it relates to one of our ongoing plot lines.



Interview compiled by Anthony Boyd of Casting Shadows



# Q&A WITH ROGUE BLADE GAMES

ERIK TENKAR  
INTERVIEWS  
JAMES GANTRY

Erik Tenkar interviews James Gantry of Rogue Blade Games

**Erik Tenkar:** I see that the Kickstarter for The Chronicles of Aerthe - Dark Fantasy recently funded. I'm sad I missed this, being the Kickstarter fiend I am as well as a fan of dark fantasy. Can you tell me where the idea of The Chronicles of Aerthe took root, and what influences might there be behind it?

**Robert Brookes:** That's not a problem! Hopefully a lot of people will be kicking themselves for missing the Kickstarter. I always wanted to make a Dark Fantasy game as a kind of counter balance to games like D&D, but Chronicles went through a lot of different designs before we reached the one we have, in fact its original name was Dead Cities.

**ET:** The Chronicles of Aerthe is a D6 system, which certainly simplifies the game for those new to the hobby. Was that a designed goal or happenstance?

**What advantages do you find sticking with a d6 instead of a d20 based system or a percentile system?**

**RB:** D6 systems I feel are more versatile and are great for bolting on extra dice or bonuses to, for example our system includes Talents and Techniques, which give bonuses to dice and all tags which also give bonuses, and that would not be as easy with a D20 and percentile system. Plus I feel D20 systems are a bit cliché now

**ET:** The Chronicles of Aerthe was your first Kickstarter. How did that work out for you? What was your biggest stressor?

**RB:** The stress came from two things. The first was waking up to discover cancelled pledges, especially cancelled pledges from people who confessed to support us, as for me this indicated a lack of faith in



# Q&A WITH ROGUE BLADE GAMES

ERIK TENKAR  
INTERVIEWS  
JAMES GANTRY

what we were trying to do and a lack of support for new independent publishers, sometimes made worse when you then see they pledged on the next big thing from well known publishers, most of whom use KS as a pre-order platform. And the second stress was the end watching it slowly move towards funding, it seemed like a really long process.

**ET:** Some of the sample art shown on your Kick-starter page is simply amazing. Who did the art and is there any thought of making prints of some of it for sale to fans of the game.

**RB:** Yeah, we have an amazing team of artists; our artists are Simon Adams, Robert Last and Russell Goh. Russell was the artist of the colour images I presume you're talking about. We have discussed selling prints to people who like the art, and if we did so that would be up to the artist. As a publisher, we are very much a collective of creative types and our team is in flux with people coming and going, so with a lot of decisions regarding artwork its down to the individual artist to decide, Rogue Blade Games will never dictate that.

**ET:** I've looked at the Quickstart for The Chronicles of Aerthe and the production quality is top notch, which bodes well for the final release of The Chronicles of Aerthe. What lays in the future for Aerthe? What else can we look forward to from Rogue Blade Games as well as Feral Games?

**RB:** Ian Liddle will do the layout for Chronicles, who does layout work for FASA on games like Earthdawn, so he is known in the industry and is a great guy. Once the core book is done and out, we

will begin work on the stretch goals. Even though we did not unlock any, we feel they are integral to the game and need to be made. Other than that, Rogue Blade Games will be working on a Skirmish game for Chronicles; we are working with a friend Ian F. Smith for rules and hopefully Daruma Productions (creators of the SLA Cannibal Sector I Skirmish game) for the miniatures. We will also be working on The District Post Apocalyptic RPG with James Flaxman and also a card game set in the same world.

Feral Games are currently running their own KS for The Zombie Squad, which they are re-writing in two new editions, the first which is just a rebuild of the very popular original game, which they are calling the Directors Cut. The second version uses the Powered by the Apocalypse Engine, created by Vincent Baker and is called the Death Row edition. So if you like dark, gritty, slightly tongue in cheek (think the second Alien movie crossed with Firefly) then check out the KS.

**ET:** James, thank you for your time. If you think I've missed a question, please feel free to present it here or any other information you think is relevant.

**A -** We are always looking to help people bring their games into reality, with either offering advice, helping with rule systems and sometimes even art. We love seeing new independent games appear as we feel they are often the more interesting end of the spectrum, so if you have an idea and your not to sure how to get it out there get in contact and if we can we will help.



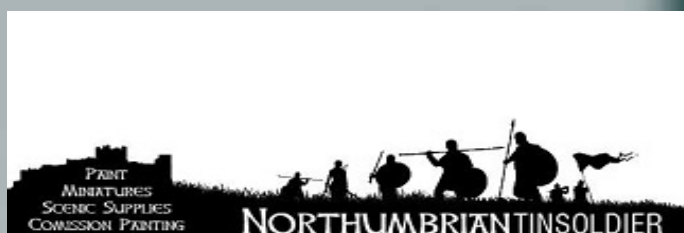
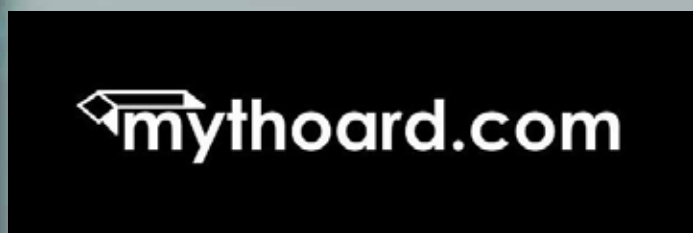
Interview compiled by Erik Tenkar of Tenkar's Tavern



# PRIZE HALL



# PRIZE HALL





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# Q&A with Ed Greenwood Enterprises

MICAH HOLMES  
INTERVIEWS  
ED GREENWOOD

*This year, I find myself extremely fortunate to be interviewing Ed Greenwood of Ed Greenwood Enterprises. Greenwood is the author of several fantasy-themed novels, gaming supplements, and is also creator of the widely popular Forgotten Realms™ setting for Dungeons & Dragons™.*

**Micah Holmes:** Mr. Greenwood I thank you for speaking with me today. Your Forgotten Realms™ setting has been a great personal influence to my creative style and content of module writing. What sources continue to inspire Greenwood Enterprises and help create new gaming products?

**Ed Greenwood:** It's "The Ed Greenwood Group" (TEGG) and not "Greenwood Enterprises," and that's important, because the key word is "Group." I'm heading a group or "Sessorium" of Creatives (writers, game designers, artists, sculptors and other artisans, actors and voice actors and musicians, and other sorts of creative folks) to create immersive world-settings in all sorts of media (transmedia, if you will). We're neither a traditional book publisher, nor a traditional game publisher. We want game adventures to be collaborative stories that grow out of setting elements, and our inspirations in creating them are the lives we lead and the experiences we have. Previous creative works by others give us the "expected tropes" of a genre like hard sf or steampunk; we want to find new ways to tell stories in such settings.

**MH:** Thank you for the correction. What new products is The Ed Greenwood Group working on and what should new gamers know about the current ones?

**EG:** TEGG plans to have over 30 settings. Two of them, Hellmaw (urban fantasy about daemons among us, in our modern, real world) and Stormtalons (broad-tapestry swords & sorcery fantasy) have launched thus far. In all of our settings, we plan to have novels and short stories, audio dramas and music, artifacts and collectibles (including things you can wear).

There are hardcover collectors' editions of the full-length works, trade paperback editions, and e-book editions of the short stories and our roleplaying game adventures, which we're calling "Quickblade" adventures. In Quickblade adventures, story comes first; there are more than enough rules systems out there already for gamers to choose from!

There's also an e-magazine, ONDER Magazine, wherein you can sample our settings, and read reviews and articles on matters creative from Sessorium members. And there will be board games of the "minigame" category and, eventually, some more substantial board games.

Right now, there are eight Hellmaw novels out, and Hellmaw short stories are just beginning to be released. There are two Stormtalons novels out, and short stories are also beginning to be released.

**MH:** What is your development team like and how well do they further develop product ideas or testing?

**EG:** TEGG isn't a traditional fiction or game publisher; rather, Sessorium members pitch ideas in any setting by way of electronic forms. The Lore Guardian for each setting (think a combination of "continuity cop" and "setting manager") evaluates all proposals, discusses them with the member(s) proposing them and with the publisher, deputy publisher, and managers of the TEGG divisions, fine-tunes them to fit in with the look and feel of that setting and other planned products, and then works with the Creatives in developing them. There is a process through which Creatives can bring onboard play testers and beta readers. You don't have to be an established professional game designer, but you do have to join the Sessorium.

**MH:** Is there a way for new talent to submit materials for consideration with The Ed Greenwood Group?

**EG:** The process I just outlined, but I'd like to emphasize that TEGG is only going to produce things for our settings, not "publish all promising game ideas." These are SHARED settings; like any shared game world, a TEGG setting is controlled by TEGG, and various Sessorium members can, with the Lore Guardian's approval, "play with" all setting elements to develop games and other spin-off products. We're looking to create immersive experiences, so folks who fall in love with a setting can drink Setting Ale from Setting Flagon, Wearing Setting Garb, and read Setting Stories or play Setting Games with others who enjoy the same Setting.

**MH:** Besides Baldur's Gate, Icewind Dale, and others spawned from Forgotten Realms™ what of your RPG's would you love to see turned into a video game?

**EG:** Over fifty years of writing and forty years of game design, I've created many more settings than the Realms, such as Aglirta, Falconfar, Castlemourn, and Embersea, and co-created settings such as Mornmist, too. I'd love to see ALL of them in video game form—but I want good games, not just "do a game for the sake of doing a game." With that said, there's room for short, simple, but charming and clever rather than brainless, games for younger players, and for the solitary player; not everything has to be large, massive, and expensive. EG:

Over fifty years of writing and forty years of game design, I've created many more settings than the Realms, such as Aglirta, Falconfar, Castlemourn, and Embersea, and co-created settings such as Mornmist, too. I'd love to see ALL of





# Q&A with Ed Greenwood Enterprises

MICAH HOLMES  
INTERVIEWS  
ED GREENWOOD

them in video game form—but I want good games, not just “do a game for the sake of doing a game.” With that said, there’s room for short, simple, but charming and clever rather than brainless, games for younger players, and for the solitary player; not everything has to be large, massive, and expensive. I’ve recently had the opportunity to work on *Mages of Mystralia*, the first in a series of games from Borealis Games, and it was a blast. This isn’t my game; it’s a game I contributed storylines and names to, and I’m very pleased with what I’ve seen of it thus far. When it’s released, check it out!

**MH:** Despite the wealth of details on the web about The Ed Greenwood Group, your products, and the myriad of stories that resulted from them what do you see players have the wrong impression about or continue to get wrong?

**EG:** I think many gamers are expecting me to start my own game company to publish “the Forgotten Realms with the Realms names filed off.” I’m not interested in doing that, though I’m still working on the Realms every day, and quite happily; expect to see some Realms releases starring Mirt the Moneylender, the original Realms character, from DM’s Guild in November, and anyone who’s been watching gaming Kickstarters knows that I’m getting to play in lots of projects by other talented folks, by doing stretch goals for them, so TEGG is something different: establishing settings to fall in love with, that will outlive me, wherein products will never go out of print (so if you like all 30 of our settings, you can guard your wallet and enjoy at your own pace). If you love Middle-Earth or Westeros or Star Trek or Star Wars, or if none of them quite turn your crank, we have new worlds for you here. And it’s “we,” not me: TEGG has bestselling, award-winning veterans aboard, and it has complete beginners, and it has lots of folks in between; everyone gets to play!

**Is there something of profound significance you’ve learned from working in the gaming industry?**

**EG:** That life is all about having fun with friends, and strangers who will become friends, not about winning. I don’t care if I ever win any game, ever again, in my life. I do like to have fun, and I don’t think many of us have enough fun in our busy, stress-filled lives. I’d like to do something to fix that.

**MH:** Is there something that stands out as a particular moment of great satisfaction throughout your personal career?

**EG:** I think the most satisfaction I get, and there have been many moments of this, is when I see gaming or fiction (usually at a convention) bring someone who is shy or lonely or young or a misfit “into the embrace” of other fans of the same thing; they make new friends, they blossom, they get HAPPY, and they just glow. I’ve attended many GenCons down the years (#8 was my first, and from #17 through #48, I didn’t miss any), and have seen this happen HUNDREDS of times, and it never gets old; it lifts my heart

and satisfies, every time.

**MH:** What do you think about the release of several documentaries about the RPG Gaming industry?

**EG:** Gratifying, that a field that I’ve been part of for all my life—and war gaming, board gaming, and dice and card games were all around long before me, but I was a gamer before roleplaying games (beyond the military *kriegspiel*) existed as an industry—has now lasted long enough that it has a history to examine; because it has endured, and gamers I knew as “older adults” are now great-grandparents to gamers; the shared fun keeps rolling. Documentaries are important because they help to show and tell outsiders about gaming, and preserve some of the faces and voices of creative individuals beyond the grave.

**MH:** Do you believe such press will raise player numbers and interest in the hobby?

**EG:** Over time, yes, because they can be used in schools, broadcast on various media, and thereby “expose a wider range of eyeballs” to the hobby. At the times of their releases, not so much, because their immediate audience tends to be gamers, those already in the industry. For them, the value is in being shown things they might have missed.

**MH:** What gaming genre, product, or supplement do you see becoming the next popular focus of interest in RPGs?

**EG:**

I try not to play the crystal ball game, so I don’t know about “next,” but I do see Virtual Reality (Oculus and the various other forms of mating goggles and telefactoring software with a computer-simulated environment) becoming more and more important. They can immerse anyone, not just a gamer willing to learn rules, in a story play experience, and they are well suited to solitary entertainment.

**And now the curveball question: What kind of thing do you think makes the best vice a person should have?**

**EG:** Curiosity, because it drives creativity and experimentation, and the entire world benefits from new products and new “hacks” (clever little ways of doing things), as a result—and because it’s the enemy of secrecy, which gets used by those in power to harm and exploit others. (Second-best vice: hedonism.)

Thank you for your contributions, Sir!



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# HERE THERE BE MONSTERS

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# HERE THERE BE MONSTERS KEY



# Q&A WITH PLAYGROUND ADVENTURES

JAMES INTROCASO  
INTERVIEWS  
BJ HENSLEY

James Introcaso interviews BJ Hensley of Playground Adventures

**Jl: What makes Playground Adventures modules uniquely suited towards younger gamers?**

BH: PGA's adventures are created beginning to end with children in mind! We purposely include rewards for good moral decisions, puzzles geared toward learning, and explanations that make it easy for children to get into the game. Many of our adventures include small aids, like recommendations for "brain break" times or even hands on projects that keep little hands busy as they wait their turns.

**Jl: A lot of the Playground Adventures Fun & Facts modules have hands-on components that allow kids to do puzzles and science experiments. What are some of your favorite examples of this and where do the ideas come from?**

BH: My favorite adventure that is currently public is For the Hive! It's a fun adventure all about bees. The PCs get to shrink down to the size of a bee and venture forth to save the queen. I love the bee facts spread throughout the adventure, and think it's fantastic that children learn about the very real hardships facing bees in our own world today.

The ideas come from our own children, teachers, schools, and our various developers. We have a pile of requests from teachers that we are wading through to help various after school and in school programs.

**Jl: Why is it important to you, personally, that kids play RPGs?**

BH: RPGs have a limitless ability to teach us things. They make a wonderful interactive classroom for problem solving, arithmetic, reading, writing, creative thought, social skills, and more. I have spent many years working with both my own children as well as others and one thing that has always stood out to me is how easily they learn when the learning is a side effect of a game they love. Very specifically, these games speak to children who otherwise struggle to learn. Who struggle to focus, sit still, or just aren't quite adept at social niceties.

I have seen children who hated math happily adding and subtracting to account for the mechanical nature of the game. Those who shun novels are somehow more easily inspired to read the rulebooks or campaign settings lying around the house (and every now and again develop a love for novels in the process). I've used RPGs to teach social skills to my own and other autistic children. Tabletop roleplaying games

make learning fun! They are fantastic tools for teaching, togetherness, and providing safe after school activities for children. It is important to me that other children benefit from these opportunities as much as my own and local children have.

**Jl: A lot of all adult gaming groups also love to play through the Playground Adventures modules. Why do you think that is?**

BH: They do! I suspect there are two reasons. First many of us are just as in need of lighter themes as the young ones are. It's surprisingly refreshing to play a not-so-serious game or better yet play from the perspective of a child. Children can do things outside the normal constraints, think outside the box, because they don't have pre-defined imaginations. They think of something and see no reason why they shouldn't be able to do it, and so they try. They don't care if they look silly or think oh that won't work. They just do. It's wonderfully refreshing to play with those characteristics in mind!

In addition, some of our adventures are a bit like beloved fairy tales. While they can be played in the lighter tones, as they are written, they can also be surprisingly dark with a few minor alterations. Pixies on Parade is a perfect example of this!





# Q&A WITH PLAYGROUND ADVENTURES

JAMES INTROCASO  
INTERVIEWS  
BJ HENSLEY

**Jl:** What are some of your favorite Playground Adventures' modules?

**BH:** Pixies on Parade is one of my absolute favorites. It's a fairy tale adventure with amusing and fun side treks, but it has a dark side as well. That adventure can be geared to teach children good choices, have fun, and use their imagination with imagination magic but it isn't all fluffy bunnies. In fact, some of the dark sides if given a more serious tone are perfect for adults. For example, I find the baby teeth section to be just creepy, and the nightmare king could easily scare some adults if you choose to spin it in a darker tone.

I'm also quite fond of the Wonderland adventure path. It's perfect for teaching new gamers the ins and outs of the game and offers some fantastic hands on adventuring. Chapter one is actually an adventure board game!

**Jl:** What's next for Playground Adventures?

**BH:** We are always working on a dozen or so items but our newest line is 12 & up! We just launched Creature Components, our first book in the 12 & up line, which allows you to make stronger spells and items by adding creature components to the mix. It received 5 stars and pretty much every recommendation available and we couldn't be happier about it!

<http://endzeitgeist.com/creature-components-volume/>

For the younger crowd we will soon be releasing a guidebook with a plethora of options for little gamers, such as classes, magic items, spells, feats, and more. Keep an eye out for Toolkits and Toyboxes (some assembly required)!

**Jl:** What can publishers do to make the community feel welcoming and inclusive of all people?

I think the simplest answer is to make content that is inclusive of all people. People want to see themselves in their games. Keep that in mind when you create. Listen to your fan base, and where you can, make adjustments to accommodate them. And I personally always try to be kind and remember that I too was once new to the game.

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# FEST HALL



Jason Nelson - Legendary Games



Jamie Chambers - Signal Fire Studios



Stephen Radney-McFarland - Paizo



James Gantry - Rogue Blade Games



Justin Andrew Mason - Paths to Adventure



Rachel Meyers - Drop Dead Studios



Emily Motteshead - Mottfolio Design



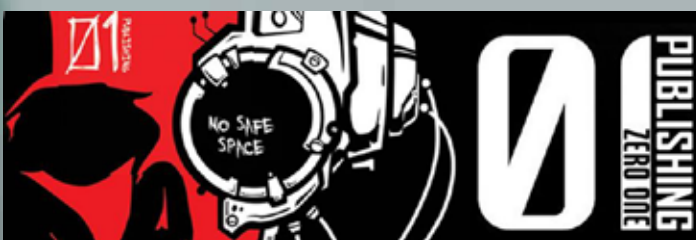
Bill Webb, Matt Finch - Frog God Games



B.J. Hensley - Playground Adventures



C. Eleri Hamilton - Inkworks Productions



Patrick McEvoy - 01 Publishing



Hal Mangold - Green Ronin Publishing





Eric Lofgren - Eric Lofgren



Chris Malidore - Chris Malidore



Brynn Metheney - Brynn Metheney



Carl Frank - Carl Frank



Oliver Shead - Immersion Studios



Andrew Ragland, Josh Harrison - FASA



Mike Mason, Michael O'Brien - Chaosium



Ed Greenwood - The Ed Greenwood Group



Sam Stewart - Fantasy Flight Games



Ehn Jolly - Purple Duck Games



Mike Myler - Mike Myler



John McNabb - McNabb Games

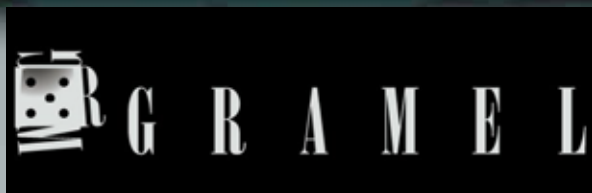


Erik Tenkar - Tenkar's Tavern



Gio Dal Farra - GG Studio





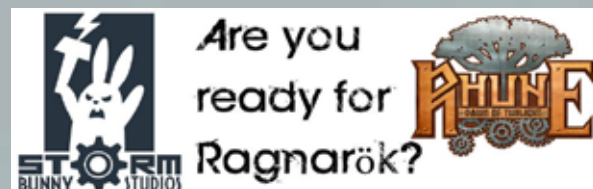
Piotr Ramel Koryś - GRAMel/Fajne RPG



Brian Fitzpatrick - Moebius Adventures



Jason Hardy - Catalyst Game Labs



Jason Sonia - Storm Bunny Studios



Shane Ivey - Arc Dream Publishing



Brandon Williams - Arcanum Syndicate



Timothy Brian Brown - Ulisses North America



Robert Brookes - Encounter Table Publishing



Sarah Nelson - Mindjammer Press



Matteo Botti - Tin Hat Games



Walt Robillard - Hazard Studio



Joe Singleton - Singular Arts



John Popson - Effin Cool Minis



John Lowen - Ironclad Miniatures



Joe Corsaro - Dragon Bait Miniatures



# Q&A WITH DIEHARD MINIATURES

ANTHONY BOYD  
INTERVIEWS  
TIM PROW

I very much enjoyed this virtual chat with miniatures-legend, Tim Prow, and am pleased to be able to share it with you:

**Antony Boyd:** What games do you play and what role do miniatures play in them?

**Tim Prow:** I think with most people when you become a parent, time for one's self evaporates. I've gamed through different genres, starting as a teenager playing mostly Games Workshop stuff, Fantasy Battle and roleplay as well as Blood Bowl and 40K. When I joined Games Workshop at the age of 17 I was amazingly fortunate to help play test games such as Space Hulk, the new at the time version of Blood Bowl, Mighty Empires and Space Marine Epic. After leaving in '93 I mostly played on computer games, Diablo and Quake being some of the earliest online gaming I did. I also enjoyed playing werewolf games from White Wolf's World of Darkness. EverQuest was one of the biggest things to affect my gaming life towards the end of the 90's. That sucked several years of my life away.

**AB:** How have miniatures and their use changed during your time in the industry?

**TP:** I think until the mid 90's miniatures had been the mainstay of any gamers experience, from roleplaying with your character figure, to large table top battles. I saw the change come in with Magic the Gathering, it sucked a large chunk of cash and players time from miniature games and for a time I worried this effect would be the beginning of the end for miniatures, but as with most fads it crested and has added itself to the gamer's world. Miniatures are still here and if anything, there are even more miniature companies out there than ever before. The next change I saw was when I moved to the US to work for Ral Partha, which was taken over by Wizkids 6 months after I'd moved. Within the 3 years I was in America, I saw the crazy that was the clicker base take off like a rocket. I think it all took us by surprise. Yet again another mouth to feed at the gaming table, but it has been absorbed, and miniatures still survive. I think the latest thing to hit is the rise of the figure designed on the PC and 3D printed. I hope it settles like the other changes we've seen in the industry and is another string to the bow, rather than something that will remove the old string.



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# Q&A WITH DIEHARD MINIATURES

ANTHONY BOYD  
INTERVIEWS  
TIM PROW

**Q: What is the most satisfying part of your work?**

A: I love to create, and with my new company I can finally start to create more and more from my own ideas. Don't get me wrong I love working freelance, you get to work with some very creative people, and the work is always varied. I've been a sculptor since 93 and I've honed my skills and am still learning, and I think that drive to be better every day is what keeps me sculpting. As long as someone out there wants my figures I'll be happily sculpting. I'm not sure how many sculptors out there paint their own figures, and I am blessed with having been at the top of two arts in the industry. Being a 'Eavy Metal painter at Games Workshop during the golden age, and having sculpted for many big names producing the best sculpts I've ever done right now. I really enjoy painting my own figures, and I usually have a paint scheme in the back of my mind when working on a sculpt.

**Q: How would you describe the allure of miniatures? What is the difference between a good design and a forgettable one? Looking back, what figures are you the proudest of?**

A: Hmm, well I'm old school, so I love the weight and feel of metal figures. It feels like you are getting something for your money. I have only maybe one or two resins in my painted collection and these were test casts from Wizkids. I think these days it's all about quality, there are more and more great sculptors joining the ranks and it would be foolish to ignore something like that. As a freelance sculptor, you have to be the best you can be. There are some amazing companies to work for as well, and the challenge is on when they send you art that stretches your abilities. I think Avatars of War gave me some of the best art to work from. Wayne England's artwork may look simple but it is highly detailed, if you're not a sculptor this is something you may miss. You think you can sculpt it in a week, but two weeks later you are still at it and cursing the art! But once the sculpt is finished it looks amazing! I don't usually have a favourite, but if I did it would probably be one from their range.

**Q: How would you describe Kickstarter? What advice would you give to someone who is considering doing it themselves?**

A: Running a KS is a double-edged sword, there are highs and lows, and when it works it works, but boy if you've missed something it can come back to bite you in the ass. My advice would be to make sure you do your sums, cover your basic costs, and don't expect the moon on a stick. Be prepared to lose a month's work as the campaign can be a busy one, answering questions,

updates and promoting your project take a lot of time, and can feel thankless. Try to give yourself some family time, as it is easy to neglect loved ones while engrossed in fluffing your backers. Having run two successful KS I found it expanded my skill set immensely, and stretched me as a person; it is very easy to live the life of a hermit being self-employed.

**Q: Other than your recent Kickstarter (Eru-Kin Expansion), what projects are ahead of you?**

A: Well Diehard Miniatures has gone from a pet project to something I'm going to have to run as more of a proper business. With each new KS we hope to add to each faction, and expand the world in which they live. At some point, I'd hope to think, with enough backing of our fans we could talk about making a rules system and game.

**Q: Is there a challenge or goal that you have not accomplished that you hope to?**

A: My challenges and goals change all the time. My pragmatism keeps my optimism in check pretty well, so I don't try to over stretch myself. My long-term goal is to be able to continue to have as much fun in this industry as I've already had, and leave my mark before pottering off this mortal coil.

**Q: What do you think of gaming online and Virtual Table Tops? Does the prospect of modelling for virtual spaces appeal to you?**

A: As a participant in early online gaming I can understand their allure, and I'm all for new modern choices for gaming, it's what keeps gaming alive and not stagnating. As with card games and clx bases it will either join them or not, I think it's too early to say. At the end of the day there is nothing so simple of primal than the want to have and hold something that is yours, a sculpted gaming pieces will always be with us.



Interview compiled by Anthony Boyd of Casting Shadows



# ANVIL ALLEY

**BLACK HAT**  
MINIATURES

**BOMBSHELL**  
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**FREEBLADES**

**DIEHARD**  
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**DRAGON: BAIT**  
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# SUPPORTERS





# Q&A WITH IS SAMURAI SHEEPDOG

MICAH HOLMES  
INTERVIEWS  
KEVIN GLUSING

Micah Holmes sits down with Kevin Glusing of Samurai Sheepdog

**Micah Holmes:** What can gamers new to your site expect your RPG materials to focus on?

**Kevin Glusing:** Our primary focus has been on Pathfinder, with an eye toward updating a lot of our original 3.x material, while still putting out some newer supplements as the opportunity arises. We are branching out to include 5th edition as well, with the introduction of Wayfaring Guides (think Foul Locales, but not as foul) and the reinvigoration of the Player's Advantage line. In 2017, we also hope to bring more out related to "The Awakened" in the form of an RPG campaign setting for both Pathfinder and 5th Edition.

**MH:** What of your products do you suggest new gamers look into first that best represent Samurai Sheepdog's offerings?

**KG:** Several of our original books still hold up well in any edition, because their rules were more additive than inclusive. Tarot magic and the Artificer's Handbook, for example, both detail new ways to experience spellcasting and magic items, respectively. More recently, Player's Advantage: Barbarian provides interesting alternatives to the traditional barbarian class.

**MH:** Can we expect to find any of your products featured in one or more Aethercon events?

**KG:** Player's Advantage: Barbarian will be featured prominently in the game Kevin Glusing is hosting this year, and is also a part of at least one of the giveaway bundles provided by Aethercon.

**MH:** What new products is Samurai Sheepdog working on and what should new gamers know about the current ones?

**KG:** New projects we are working on now include Player's Advantage: Fighter (written by Charles Plemons for Pathfinder to be adapted to 5e by Kevin Glusing), some new Foul Locales (written by Bret Boyd for Pathfinder, also to be adapted to 5e), and The Awakened, a new RPG.

Of our current projects, Player's Advantage: Barbarian (and the PA line, in general) contains new ways to go about making characters that feel more in tune with a story, while losing almost nothing in the way of general power or capability. Explanations are provided for subclasses, multiclass options, and alternative class progressions outside of either. There are also new weapons, feats, and more, added as we see fit for any given class.

**MH:** Are your supplements cross compatible or have reasonable scalability with other rulesets?

**KG:** While most of the newer content we provide is housed within specific rulesets, the information related to it is always cross compatible. Regardless of the version of game you play, there is some barbarian equivalent to which you can apply the multiclass options to make a Siege Breaker (fighter), Vengeant (paladin), or Wildblooded (sorcerer) with only a few minor tweaks to the rules.



# Q&A WITH IS SAMURAI SHEEPDOG

MICAH HOLMES  
INTERVIEWS  
KEVIN GLUSING

**MH:** Is there a way for new talent to submit materials for consideration with Sam-Sheep (If I can get away with calling it that)?

**KG:** Absolutely! We have so many great ideas, and still only a very small team of contributors in Kevin (who not only writes, but also manages RPGs in general, scouts art, and does layout for all of our recent books), Charles Plemons, and Bret Boyd. Those who are interested in writing for us are encouraged (but not required) to look over the Foul Locales and Player's Advantage lines primarily to help decide if they feel like we would be a good fit. We have a few updates to older material (to bring it into the new editions) that are currently shelved while we push other content ahead of it. If you can meet deadlines without sacrificing quality, you are welcome to contact us through our Facebook page or our website to discuss fair rates and other expectations.

**MH:** I noticed while browsing your website you're collaborating with Ed Greenwood (Greenwood Enterprises) and others on a book based on your setting "The Awakened". Can you tell us about the project?

**KG:** The Awakened is a two (going on five) book series of short stories written by a variety of authors set in the world of Grimaton, where turning nineteen can mean gaining extraordinary gifts. Awakened are revered by some, hated by others, and hunted by still more. Each story in the series offers another perspective on the world, developing it as a whole in a way that one author alone generally can't do in an equal amount of time. With 33 stories now (only some of which are continuations), we feel like all of the authors who join us to bring this world to life have done an amazing job at exactly that.

**MH:** What's the future look like for Samurai Sheepdog?

**KG:** Busy. Our name is starting to catch on not only for RPGs but also novels and board games (headed by Ken Shannon). We even brought a newer member to the team (Jon Wolf) at the beginning of last year. Jon works with us to develop gaming apps for various phone and computer-based mediums.

**MH:** And now the curveball question: What kind of thing do you think makes the best vice a person should have?

**KG:** If you're going to have some vice when it comes to game design (or work in general), make it voracity. Eagerness to work and enthusiasm to complete projects properly helps get more work out the door, just don't sacrifice quality for quantity by taking on too much at a time.



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# ARTIST'S ENCLAVE

## Wallpaper Artists



Bruno Balixa



Eric Lofgren



Will O'Brien



Chris Malidore



Colin Chan



Eric Messinger



Marisa Erven



Seth Rutledge



Jon Gibbons



Adam Schmidt



Dion Harris



David Michael Wright III

# Artist's Enclave

## Wallpaper Artists

### Speed Paint Duelists

Bruno Balixa  
Preston Stone  
Eric Messinger  
Adam Schmidt  
Robin Irwin  
Cathy Wilkins  
Colin Chan  
Patrick McEvoy  
Chris Malidore  
Devin Rosychuk  
Anton Magdalena  
Lloyd Metcalf  
Will O'Brien  
Vlada Monakhova  
Benjamin Galley  
Patricia Smith  
Marisa Erven  
Seth Rutledge

### Bartenders

Charles Wright  
***Frog God Games***  
  
Renaë Chambers  
***Signal Fire Studios***  
  
Brent Evans  
***Catalyst Games***  
  
Will Donovan  
***The Ed Greenwood Group***  
  
C. Eleri Hamilton  
***InkWorks Productions***  
  
Hal Mangold  
***Green Ronin***  
  
Alida Saxon  
***Pinnacle Entertainment Group***  
  
Jason Sonia  
***Storm Bunny Studios***  
  
Cat Tobin  
***Pelgrane Press***  
  
Tin Hat Games



# Q&A WITH KOBOLD PRESS

ERIK TENKAR  
INTERVIEWS  
WOLFGANG BAUR

Erik Tenkar interviews Wolfgang Baur from Kobold Press

**Erik Tenkar:** As one of the earliest writers / publishers to go the crowdfunding route with your projects, what would you say your largest challenges were when your first started with crowdfunding?

**Wolfgang Baur:** The biggest hurdle early on was finding the audience for this new and unfamiliar way to fund game development. For the first crowdfunding project, I used a PayPal tip jar, which has no visibility whatsoever—people were really going out on a limb and trusting me to deliver on my promises, and that their money was going toward making a high-quality product. There was no running total, no network of other backers, no anything that we take as a given today. I did have stretch goals, of a sort. Every dollar I raised went toward specific upgrades such as maps, art, etc.

The real barrier, though, was convincing anyone that the project would happen. Once I shipped the first crowdfunded book, *Steam & Brass* back in 2006, things got easier.

**ET:** You currently have a Kickstarter project running, *Demon Cults & Secret Societies: 5th Edition & Pathfinder RPG*. Thinking back to those early crowdfunding projects, how have the challenges changed? Which are the same?

**WB:** For me, personally, it's much easier because Kobold Press has been around for 10 years, and has successfully shipped many, many projects. It's our ninth time on Kickstarter, and our 20th-ish crowdfunded book. So, we have a reputation for delivering our projects reasonably close to on time, often either at a discount to the retail price or with a boatload of extras. We've earned our customers' trust over the years, and that helps tremendously.

(It also helps that we have a completed manuscript in hand before we Kickstarted this one.)

At the same time, backer expectations changed when Kickstarter became the dominant platform. The main appeal of what I called Open Design, was that project patrons got to be part of an exclusive process, watching the designer create the adventure or sourcebook they'd backed, and participating in project polls and brainstorming. The focus was on a design community and process.

When I switched to Kickstarter, I found that its community of RPG backers doesn't care quite as much about behind-the-scenes access: they either want significant upgrades to the product, or tangible rewards such as exclusive adventures, special edition hardcovers, art prints, related software, and other playable elements. Satisfying that demand has undone many an inexperienced crowdfunder. Thankfully, I've been doing this long enough that I know what I can and can't deliver.

**ET:** Stepping back a bit in the Kobold timeline, Kobold Press designed *Tyranny of Dragons* for WotC's D&D 5e. If memory serves me correctly, that was the first published adventure for 5e. How did such an arrangement come to be, how was it in practice and just as importantly, will there be more of such releases?

**WB:** The RPG industry includes a lot of people who've worked in some capacity for Wizards of the Coast, so they generally have a sense of who would be a good fit for certain projects. So one day, out of the blue, Mike Mearls asked if I'd be interested in doing some early work for 5th edition. I was more than happy to be asked! We quickly shifted other projects around, and we scrambled to bring as much talent to bear on it as possible. We knew it was a level above the work we had done to date, and everyone worked incredibly hard to turn over *Tyranny* in as close to final, publishable files as possible.

In practice, there was still a level of confusion about certain monsters, playtest results rolled around in waves, and (as is normal for every edition launch) it had some elements of carnival maelstrom about it. But the Wizards team has been through those sorts of times before, and handled it with aplomb. I think the Kobolds kept their end up as well,



# Q&A WITH KOBOLD PRESS

ERIK TENKAR  
INTERVIEWS  
WOLFGANG BAUR

though our skills at improvisation, trapsmithing, and jury-rigging were certainly tested.

I don't think Wizards will do more of those design studio arrangements. They're super-stressful for small companies (like ours) that don't have Wizards' resources to draw on, and I have the sense that they want to keep future releases in-house. I'd be happy to be proven wrong, of course.

**ET:** Kobold Press is fairly well known for its "Kobold Guide to..." series (Game Design, World Building, Magic, etc). In many ways, it strikes me as a spiritual successor to Kobold Quarterly, with similarly themed articles from different authors in the RPG Hobby. Is this an accurate observation? How do you herd all of the cats for each release? ;) Which, if any, is your personal favorite? What's next in the series?

**WB:** I find having an assortment of authors and different voices more interesting and more useful than a single voice. But in terms of timing, the first Kobold Guide came out just a year into Kobold Quarterly's run, so the series isn't a successor to the magazine. Both the series and the magazine are an expression of my preferred approach to things.

Working with this amazing roster of designers isn't always smooth (bumps are always to be expected in any creative process), but the contributors are professionals, and the essays range in quality between home runs and triples. I mean... it's just hard to complain when you've managed to get Monte Cook, Zeb Cook, Kenneth Hite, and Keith Baker in the same volume, right?

The cat herding is easy for me: I just hand the project to an experienced book editor, like John Rateliff, Janna Silverstein, or Ray Vallese. They make it look easy, even when there's a bit of jackhammering to make it all fit.

My personal favorite? I'm really happy with the Kobold Guide to Plots & Campaigns {Kobold / Amazon / DriveThru}, especially because Margaret Weis is a contributor to it. I first met her back in the TSR days, and always hoped she might write something for Kobold Press. So I kept asking her for essays, but she always has a lot of work on her plate and kept having to decline—until this time! In her essay she talks about generating exciting action scenes that move a campaign forward; the whole book is loaded with great insights from her and from other designers, novelists, and worldbuilders.

**ET:** Kobold Press, like many other publishers using Kickstarter, has been publishing its latest works for both Pathfinder and 5e. Is this viable long term? How great of a duplication of effort does it take to get both versions done in a timely fashion? Has one edition started pulling in greater numbers than the other?

**WB:** I'm not sure it is viable long term. However, it can be done short term, and we've done it before in the PF/4th Edition era and even with Pathfinder/13th Age. Kobold Press takes the "Switzerland of Gaming" approach to various d20-rolling editions. That was certainly our editorial direction for Kobold Quarterly, and the company has published supplements and adventures for D&D 3.5, 4th Edition, Pathfinder, 13th Age, Dragon AGE, and now, 5th Edition.

Getting it done in a timely way means having two separate teams, one for each system. It's twice as much work, but not twice as much funding, so it's a real challenge. I don't know how Frog God manages it with not two systems, but three at a time!

Looking at the Demon Cults & Secret Societies Kickstarter {LINK = <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/350683997/demon-cults-and-secret-societies-5th-edition-and-p/>}, the 5th Edition backers are making twice as many pledges as Pathfinder backers. That makes me a little sad, because Pathfinder is where Kobold Press got its first big start, and we want to continue supporting it. At the same time, gaming has always had systems rise and fall, and there may come a day when we ring the bell for a Pathfinder project and not that many people show up. It's much too soon to count it out (Starfinder is coming in 2017, after all), but for now the trend is clearly running toward 5th Edition D&D. It's also what the Kobold Press crew is playing most often on game night right now.

**ET:** Wolfgang, I'd like to thank you for your time. If there is anything you'd like to add that I failed to ask about, please, add it here.

**WB:** I just want to thank everyone who has supported Kobold Press along the way. Players, other publishers, storeowners, and artists have all helped with their insights, feedback, and purchases of Kobold Press adventures and sourcebooks. I'm really happy that the company has survived and grown. Where we are today isn't anything I could have imagined 10 years ago. But that's kobolds for you: we're scrappy!



Erik Tenkar of Tenkar's Tavern



# Q&A WITH THISTLE GAMES

ERIK TENKAR  
INTERVIEWS  
DAVID MORRISON

Erik Tenkar interviews David Morrison of Thistle Games

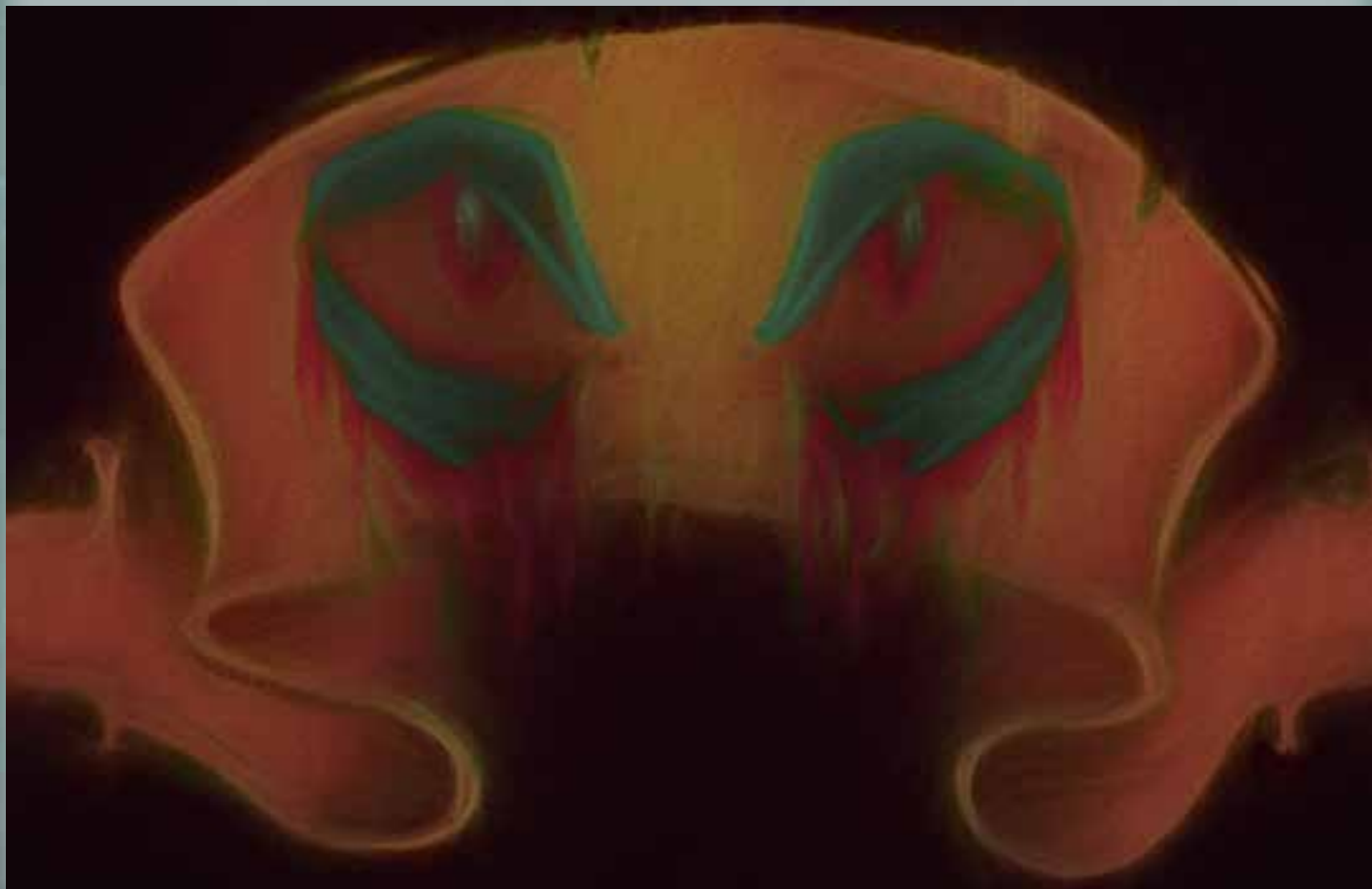
**Erik Tenkar:** *Renegade* was your first RPG release, which was followed by *Corruption*. Both are fairly grounded in the OSR. What was the evolution that brought you from *Renegade* to *Corruption*? What goals were you trying to achieve?

**David Morrison:** *Treasure*, *Renegade* and *Corruption* weren't published in a particular order. They're rooted in the gaming of the 70s and 80s when RPGs were emerging, so improvising with rules, dungeon design, and gameplay were all an on-going experiment. *Renegade* is largely a subset of *Corruption* for passing round to new players and offering a very playable introduction to tabletop. *Corruption* is, at core, the work of others, notably S&W, and the intention there was to look at knitting adventure and campaign design into the rules. Part of that involved optional building blocks to theme campaigns - be that distinctive monster races; proposing campaign wide challenges; or the excesses of spells above 9th level or powerful monster character classes.

**ET:** In 2013 you published *The RPG Handbook – Getting Started*. If you were to write the book now, 3 years later, what changes would you make if any? Which lesson(s) do you think is the most important for your readers to take with them?

**DM:** It seems to have been a largely positive three years with OSR/rules-light and more recent styles of play working together to grow the hobby. There has been a bit of a shift towards welcoming youngsters into the hobby as part of that, so publishers look to be doing a good job of getting people started. Improving on the images would be my obvious aim with any follow up - and there's a stack of games such as *5e* and *Seven Seas*, which have had quite an impact recently. In terms of a top tip - the most fun is when everyone's having fun.

**ET:** *The Thrice Slain King* highlights some interesting aspects of Scottish and British history and mythology, much of which is interwoven as well as forgotten by modern people. What inspired you to dig into this history? Have you generated any hooks or plots for your gaming from the research you conducted?



# Q&A WITH THISTLE GAMES

ERIK TENKAR  
INTERVIEWS  
DAVID MORRISON

DM: Hadn't expected you to look over that, as they're early notes stuck there for a few enthusiasts on the topic rather than anything else. That said I'm originally a historian and involved in content development concerning Scottish history in recent years. The fun there is, in part, the input into gaming, but also the disconcerting side. About a week ago we were working as a group on some of the partially decoded Pictish sculptures/ stones - and it's a bit 'Temple of Doom' decoding this material from the early medieval to get at their world. It helps that they lived dramatic lives.

ET: Your more recently released games step a way from the comfort zone of traditional roleplaying games. The *Book of Dreams* and *The Book of Nightmares* are described as "a story or plot generator in the form of a digital tapestry." What took you down this path? Has it been used to enhance or supplement traditional roleplaying?

DM: Those are the first results of going back to longstanding project *Treasure*. The HTML version is downloadable and playable with light modding, but in some ways it's been more of an experiment/ ideas generator all along. The story block type titles are just one readily accessible way to get at the overall aim of easily developing open narratives with a strong visual element. I would see them as one way to introduce people to storytelling games and RPGs - there are a number of comparable boardgames and dice games. They may also be of use as warm-up games or in building narratives for scenarios.

ET: Your Scottish Media Lab Icon Packs look like they would be very useful for virtual tabletop gaming (VTT). I personally like the solid icons for their simplicity and usability. They are a recent addition to the Thistle Games product line. What inspired you to add art icons to the Thistle Games product line? Can we expect more? How do you use them in the games that you play?

DM: As part of both *Treasure* and *Corruption* I tried out releasing customizable versions with editable files and a selection of placeable B&W artwork. A make what you like of it; skin your personal/ gaming group version approach. At the time, I lacked sufficient artwork to really hit the mark there, but I have been developing a fresh pool of colour artwork and icons to allow me to make lots of different types of gaming content. I've a number of things to get done along the way yet, but the intention remains to make it available for others to mod or mash up. Hopefully, that's part of putting together a pool of resources to invite someone thinking of trying out as a DM/ forming a group to explore lots of options, without lots of rules.



Interview compiled by Erik Tenkar



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*Cover Art By David Michael Wright III*

*Convention Magazine Layout By Colin Chan*

# FUNNIEST GAMING STORY EVER

MICHAEL O'BRIEN

I love RPGs and LARPs, but I didn't do much gaming at all between 2004 - 2014. This was because I found myself living in a LARP (live action roleplaying game) for an entire decade.

I spent this time living in the Middle East, working for a large local university. Although my job titles were similar to what they would be back in the Western world – associate dean, managing editor and the like – the roles I played were (at times) more like a mixture of *Game of Thrones*, *Blackadder* and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. For start, in the Islamic calendar it's currently 1438 (unlike our more familiar BC-AD dating, the hijri calendar started in AD 622, and has only 254 days in its year). But, if you add in a thin veneer of technology and wondrous architecture (that's the DS9 bit), in many respects how things worked there was just like it would have been in the western world in 1436 – essentially a feudal society, emerging into the modern era. In fact, if you had that mind set, it all began to make sense. Within the lifetimes of people born there, the country had, through the beneficence of oil, transformed from a poverty-stricken backwater without roads, schools or other modern infrastructure, into a land of gleaming skyscrapers, freeways and mobile phones. Despite these changes, the 1438 mentality remained: although women are free to drive and work, and a certain degree of religious toleration is accepted and, as a (non muslim) expat I was able to buy pork and even drink alcohol, the country is not a Western Liberal Democracy.

The head of the institution I worked for was a Sheikh. A genuine Arabian prince who lived in a palace. A Sheikh of the old school, in the sense that just about every day of the week his majlis (audience chamber) was open to anyone to come and pay their respects or make requests of him. This could range from 'please sponsor my university studies in the USA' through to 'I need new tires for my old truck on my farm'. This would be followed by prayer for those of the Faithful, and then a huge banquet for all in attendance. The Sheikh lived much of his days and evenings like this.

As part of the senior management of my institution, I was obliged to go the sheikh's majlis on a regular basis. Although this certainly lost its zing after the 20th or 30th time, you never knew who might be there. There were the faces from local business, banking, and diplomatic folk; including Bollywood stars, visiting dignitaries, captains of industry and more. Once I even sat next to "Comical Ali", the former Iraqi information minister who now lives in exile in Dubai. Another time, the former military dictator of Pakistan attended with bodyguards in tow. They were serious looking dudes – I thought if I sneezed suddenly I might get shot between the eyes.

Late one afternoon, I was sitting in my office when one of the vice chancellor's flunkies came to me and said I had to go to the palace tonight. By this stage I no longer asked what the occasion was, I simply rang my wife to say I wouldn't home for dinner, grabbed my jacket, and headed down there.

When I got at the palace I was surprised: the only people in the majlis were people from my institution – other deans,

academic supervisors, faculty members and staff. Down at the end, I even noticed that the photocopy room guy was sitting there, awkwardly wearing a tie. This was very strange. Where was the usual assortment of bankers, entrepreneurs and deal-makers, not to mention Bollywood stars and other members of the good and the great?



After we waited around for a while the Sheikh emerged from his private office. Over his white robes he was wearing a bisht, the black outer cloak worn on special or formal occasions. We all stood up as he waited in the lobby. Moments later the visiting dignitary arrived in a small motorcade of black limousines.

The special visitor was the president of an African country, with his entourage of burly guys in shiny suits. He came through and shook hands with all of us, before sitting for a conversation with the Sheikh, carried out with the help of a translator. Although the Sheikh usually enjoyed chatting with visitors, the conversation was very brief. The banquet following this was, uncharacteristically, even quicker, and then the president and his entourage were whisked away in their black cars. The Sheikh cast off his bisht and returned to his private office, and so my fellow work colleagues and I all went home. It was one of my shortest ever visits to the majlis.

What was going on? I later learned the African president was making a courtesy visit, en route to somewhere else. The Sheikh I worked for must have been deputised to do the diplomatic niceties. However, the African president was said to be horrendously corrupt. Neither the World Bank, nor the IMF were prepared to lend his government money, and his capital city had just ranked lower than Baghdad (then in midst of bloody civil strife) as one of the world's least liveable cities. I don't think the usual bankers, entrepreneurs and deal-makers wanted to be seen in this president's company.

He certainly didn't need to meet a bunch of un-influential academics either, but I think we were introduced as the bankers, entrepreneurs and deal-makers one would normally find in the Sheikh's majlis. I might have been introduced to the president as the head of HSBC Middle East, the photocopy guy as the head of Standard Chartered Bank, and so on. LARPing pure and simple.

Stuff like this is why I didn't game much during my ten years living in the Middle East. My life was a live action roleplaying game, and I simply never knew what might happen next. Another memorable occasion I found myself on stage with the Sheikh and Plácido Domingo, with Prince Charles and Camilla sitting in the front row – but that's a story for another time.